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AUTHOR Willner, Alan G.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the training of personnel in the delivery of child-care services to institutionalized Youth. The emphasis is on training personnel in interaction behaviors that are preferred by youth themselves. Two studies are reported. The first determined what types of interactions the youth preferred, and validated these preferences on larger samples. The second study outlines a program designed to train "teaching parents: in these youth-preferred interaction behaviors. It demonstrates that behavioral styles can be modified in the direction desired. The authors feel that modification of the behavior of youth care personnel will make it more likely for youth to move in the direction of socially desirable behaviors and goals. (NG)

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The Training and Validation of Youth-Preferred Social Behaviors of Child-Care Personnel

Alan G. Willner, Curtis J. Braukmann, Kathryn A. Kirigin, Dean L. Fixsen, Elery L. Phillips and Montrose M. Wolf

University of Kansas

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The Training and Validation of Youth-Preferred Social Behaviors of Child-Care Personnel

The successful training of personnel in the delivery of child-care services is thought to be an essential part of any productive social rehabilitation program. Yet despite this concern for adequate training, very few treatment programs have reported systematic attempts to train and evaluate the training of their professional child-care workers.

There are probably two specific dimensions relevant to a successful training program. One dimension might involve the training of personnel in those skills which prove effective -- effective in teaching their youths appropriate social, academic, vocational and self-help behavior. A second dimension might involve training personnel in interaction behaviors which are preferred by the recipients of the treatment program. This second dimension, that of youth preference, is important for several reasons. Firstly, there is evidence suggesting that if an adult model is positive and rewarding, it is more likely that the youths will benefit from the treatment program (Jesness, 1974), as well as learn from and identify with that adult (Bandura, 1969). Secondly, youth satisfaction and willingness to participate in treatment also bear upon current legal and ethical guidelines concerning the rights of patients, including the importance of obtaining initial and ongoing informed consent (under current NIMH/HEW guidelines). This voluntary aspect of youth participation means, essentially, that the youth must be satisfied with the program and willing to stay with it, particularly in community-based, open, residential settings where the opportunity to run away is

always available. Another practical consideration for training personnel in interaction styles preferred by kids is that it seems to be important to the people who hire and evaluate child-care workers. Typically, job descriptions for these personnel list prerequisites for hiring which include "warmth" and "concern". Also, even once hired, child-care personnel are often informally evaluated by a variety of people in contact with the program in terms of the quality of their interactions with the youths, and these evaluations may carry important implications for the program's survival within the community. Therefore, it was critical that positive social interaction skills be clearly identified and trained, and that the impact of this training be carefully assessed. This assessment would require validating the effects of training with youths living in several group homes, as well as comparing the ratings and behavioral performance of trainees with those of successful, professional child-care personnel (known as teaching-parents).

Study 1

Nineteen youths (eleven boys and eight girls) participated in this research. The youths were 12 through 16 years old and had been adjudicated by the juvenile court. At the time they were living in three small, family-style, community-based, group homes using the Achievement Place Teaching-Family Model. To determine their preference for teaching-parent social behavior, a series of videotaped interactions between a youth and teaching-parents were shown to the youths. These interactions included teaching skills, instruction giving, asking and answering questions, giving and taking points, joking, counseling, and commending or correcting the youth. As the youths watched these scenes, they were asked to write

down the specific teaching-parent behaviors that they liked or disliked in each scene. In this way, approximately 790 written comments were collected. These comments were later examined and sorted into twenty-nine categories which best described the written comments. These categories were then prepared for rating by the youths in the group homes. The ratings were carried out to validate the importance of these categories. That is, although originally generated by the youths, it was important to know if the written descriptions of the social behavior would also be rated as strongly liked or disliked. Ratings were carried out along a five-point grading scale (A through F; 4 through 0) according to how well the youths liked the social behavior in interaction with teaching-parents. The results indicated that those categories which were rated in the A or B range were the identical to those categories originally described as "liked" by the youths (when viewing the videotapes), whereas those rated in the D and F range were all originally described as "disliked". For example, those behaviors rated as most liked by the youths include: calm-pleasant voice tone; offering or providing help; joking and positive feedback, and those rated as most aversive included: throwing objects; accusing-blaming statements; shouting; not providing the youth with an opportunity to speak; insulting remarks (and so forth).[The remaining categories falling in the B- to C- mid-range, consisted of those novel categories suggested by the investigators as "potentially important" behaviors. Our hunches washed out completely. We had suggested behaviors such as eye contact, physical contact and giving verbal examples. None of these suggested categories, however, were rated as very important behavior by the youths.] Therefore, there appeared to be some discriminability and consistency over time by the youths

in their classification and rating of various categories of teaching-parent interaction behavior. The results of this study indicate that youths can identify, describe and rate those interaction behaviors which are important to them, and that these preferences maintain over time. The question then became, 'Can prospective teaching-parents be trained in the use of these preferred social behaviors, and once trained does it make a difference in the way youths view them'. To answer these questions, a second study was carried out.

Study 2

Three married couples (i.e., six trainees) considered satisfactory candidates to become teaching-parents, received training in these youth-preferred interaction behaviors. The training program took place over the course of two three-hour training sessions, but was presented to the couples at different points in time over a period of 5 months (using a multiple baseline design across trainees). During the five-month period, samples of their interaction behavior were taken on 4 to 6 occasions. Each sample involved two (three-minute) videotaped probe situations, with a trainee interacting with a youth, who was role-playing a youth in the group home.

In the first situation, the trainee was asked to enter and greet the youth seated in the room. But the youth was to ignore the greeting and continue reading a book, providing an opportunity for the trainee to teach the youth greeting skills in a pleasant, socially preferable manner. Greeting skills were selected as one example of a more general class of polite, socially responsive behaviors important in a variety of interactions, as well as specifically enhancing the pleasantness

of group home family living. In a second situation, the trainee was again instructed to enter the room and ask the seated youth to empty a wastebasket. In this instance, the youth had been taught to object, grumble, be slow to comply, ask for a postponement, and otherwise appear very reluctant to agree. Here, the opportunity to focus on the youth's ongoing, non-compliant behavior was available, and to provide the youth with those skills necessary to successfully respond to requests commonly encountered by the youth in a variety of interactions with adults -- whether they be parents, judges, teachers or employers. These situations were selected with the goal of posing somewhat difficult, but not atypical examples of youth behavior in the group home setting. It was hypothesized that if trainees could interact in a pleasant, youth-preferred and instructional manner in these circumstances, they would be likely to be able to engage in this behavior in a variety of other, less taxing situations.

The actual training program emphasized the teaching of practical and preferred skills involved in a variety of social and helping interactions with youths in the home. Training included reading material, oral instructions and rationales for the use of these behaviors; videotaped examples of these preferred behaviors; and role-playing simulations involving detailed feedback of performance and practice to criterion.

In addition to the trainees, three highly evaluated, successful professional teaching-parents currently involved in the operation of Achievement Place style homes, also participated in the study. These couples served as a normative comparison sample for the trainees. Data were also taken on their interaction with youths as a basis for making comparisons between their behavior (and rated performance) and that of the trainees.

Following the completion of the training program, youths in two Achievement Place style group homes observed these tapes and rated the trainees in these films on the basis of how well they liked the trainee's behavior. These tapes were also analyzed by adult observers for the presence of each of the 29 categories of youth-preferred interaction behavior.

The average reliability for scoring these behaviors was 97% agreement (with occurrence reliability averaging 82% agreement, and nonoccurrence averaging 90% agreement).

The results of the youth ratings can be seen in this first figure (#1), where the behavior of the six trainees were rated along a five-point scale (4 through 0; A through F) according to how well the youths liked the trainee's behavior. The heavily dashed lines represent the presentation of the training program to each trainee, and the lightly dashed line in the upper left area of the figure (labeled Ms. K) represents a contamination of baseline, where unscheduled exposure to training occurred. As shown here, ratings of baseline generally appeared within the "D" and "C" range, whereas following training, youth ratings of the behavior rise to the "A" to "B-" range (3.7 to 2.6). Also, all post-treatment data points fell within the range of ratings of the professional teaching-parents (noted to the right of each graph). This normatively defined "acceptable level" captured all post-treatment data points.

The percentages of youth-preferred trainee behavior (i.e., both "liked" and "disliked") are displayed in this figure (#2). The levels of "disliked" behavior remained generally low for each of the trainees throughout the course of study, whereas the percentage of "liked" behavior <u>increased</u> with training for four of

the six trainees. Also, these levels of "liked" behavior generally fell post-training within or just beneath the normative comparison range of the professional teaching-parents; whereas prior to training, "liked" behavior never fell within, and seldom approximated this range.

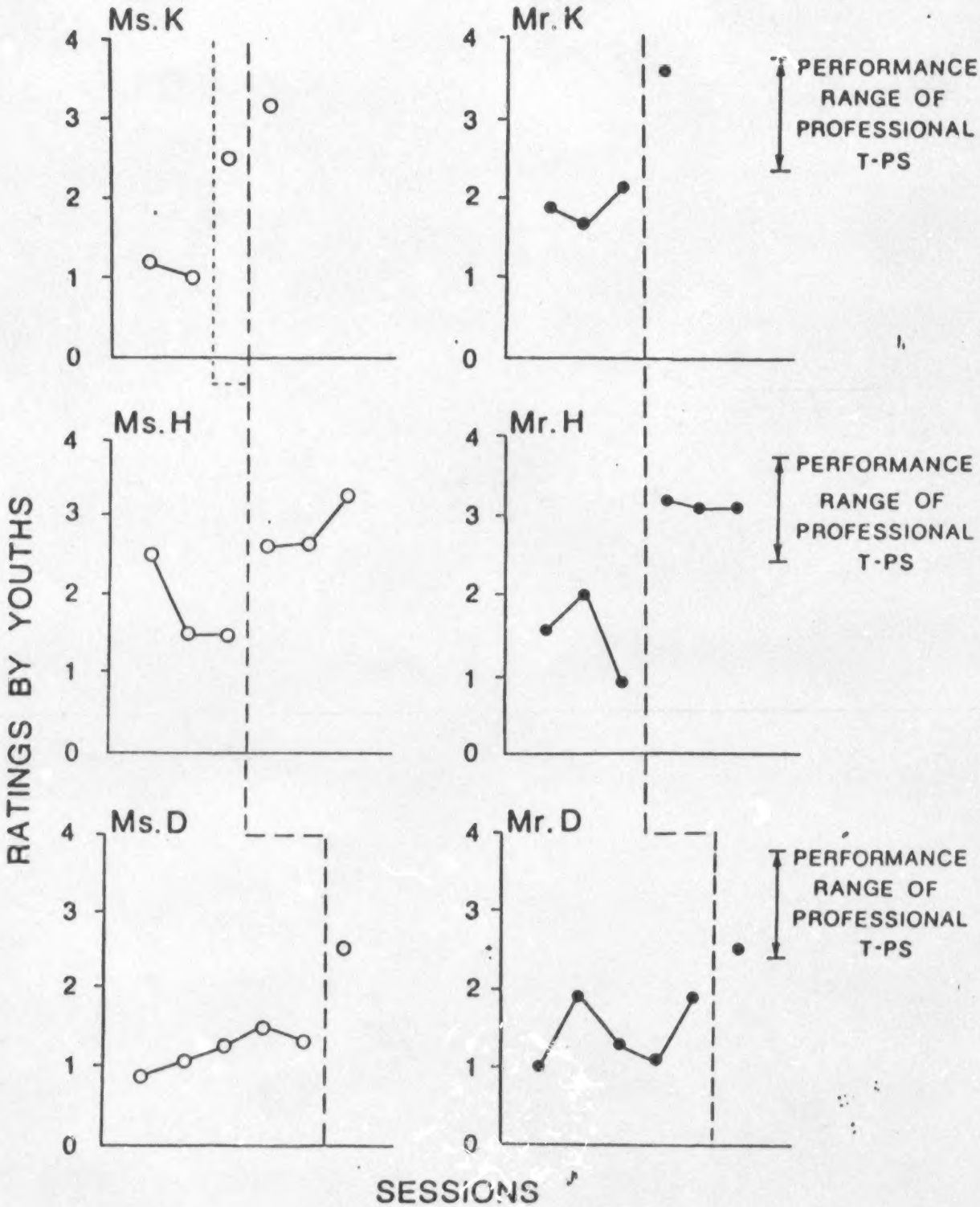
Changes in specific preferred categories of behavior were also assessed, revealing greatest changes in such behavior as providing token-based incentives (points), offering or providing help to a youth, being succinct and to the point, providing positive feedback, smiling, offering rationales for why a given behavior should be engaged in, and providing instructional explanations to a youth.

The extent to which changes in trainee behavior corresponded to changes in youth ratings is shown in this next figure. As in previous figures, trainee behavior appears as a line graph, whereas youth ratings now appear in the form of a histogram (stat. correl. Pearson product-moment r=.65 for all youths [r-.41 for boys' ratings only; r=.71 for girls']).

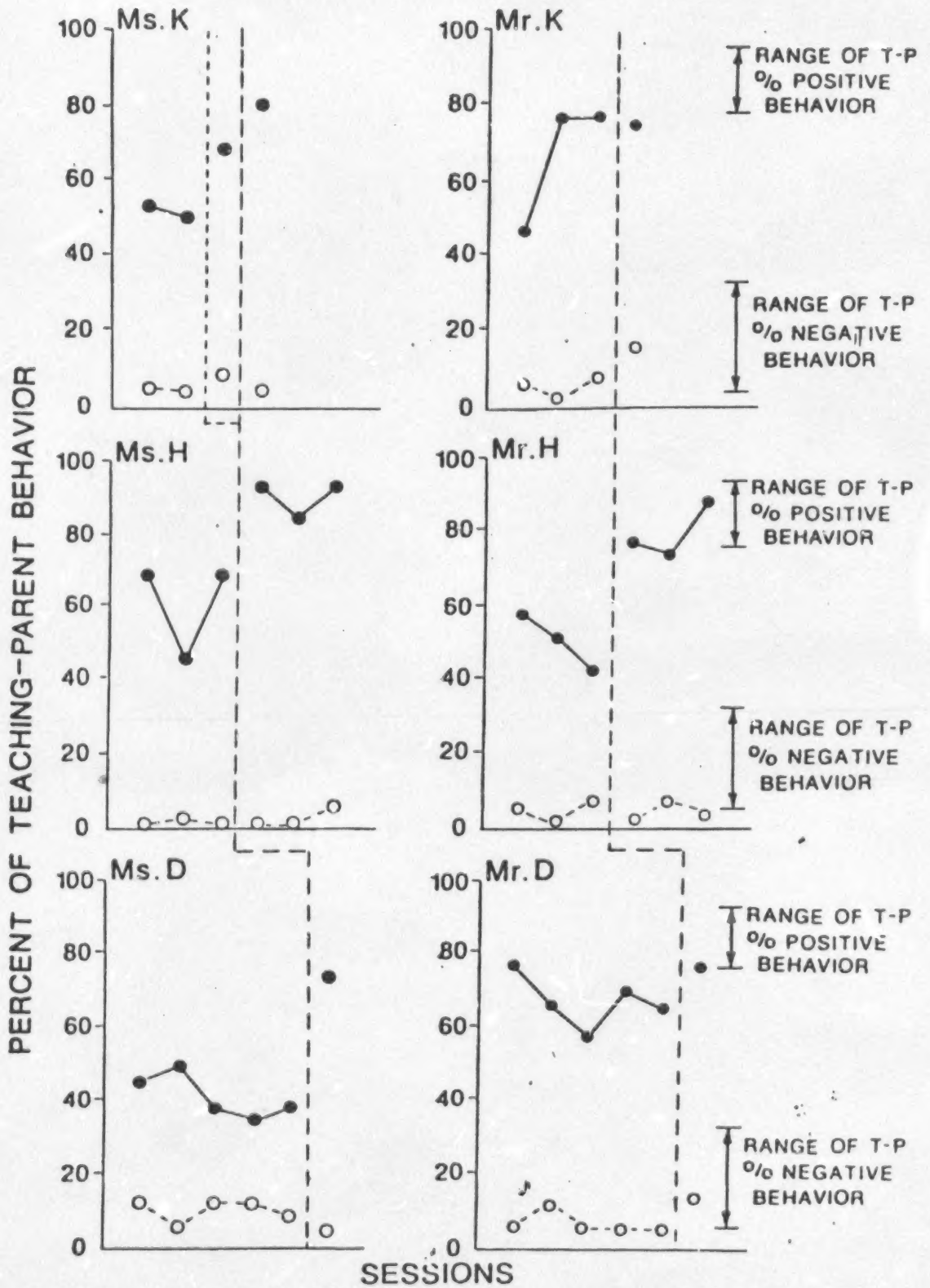
The conclusions drawn from these results are, of course, necessarjly tentative. However, based upon these preliminary data, it appears that couples desiring to receive training as youth-care personnel can be trained to engage in highly preferred interaction behaviors with youths, and that youth evaluations (i.e., ratings) of these interactions increase with training. The social validity of these measures was supported not only by these corresponding changes in youth ratings, but also by comparisons to normative data of the rated and behavioral performance of professional teaching-parents. Prior to treatment, trainee's behavior were rated by youths as "not liked", or at best, "neither liked nor disliked", however, after receiving training, the ratings of their behavior were meaningfully increased to the "liked" and "really liked very much" range.

Well, given that the behaviors trained in the present study are preferred by youths, the question still remains, are these behaviors effective in modifying delinquent behavior and training pro-social behavior (or at least compatible with these goals)? Several investigators (Ford, Ford, Christophersen, Fixsen, Phillips, & Wolf, 1973; Timbers et al, 1973) have reported improvement in a variety of social and maintenance behaviors using similar components with delinquent youths. These include the use of simple instructions and motivational incentives (point giving), and further imporvement through the use of positive feedback, instructional explanations, and providing rationales. These components were also functional -- according to other investigators -- (Phillips, Phillips, Fixsen, and Wolf, 1971) in teaching youths simple instruction following introduction skills, various aspects of converstaional behavior (Minkin et al, 1973; Maloney et al, 1972; Phillips, 1968), job interview skills (Braukmann et al, 1974), and improving on the job performance (Ayala, Minkin, Phillips, Fixsen, & Wolf, 1973). Therefore it appears as though at least some of the preferred interaction behaviors considered in this research have also been demonstrated to be effective in modifying a variety of youth behavior.

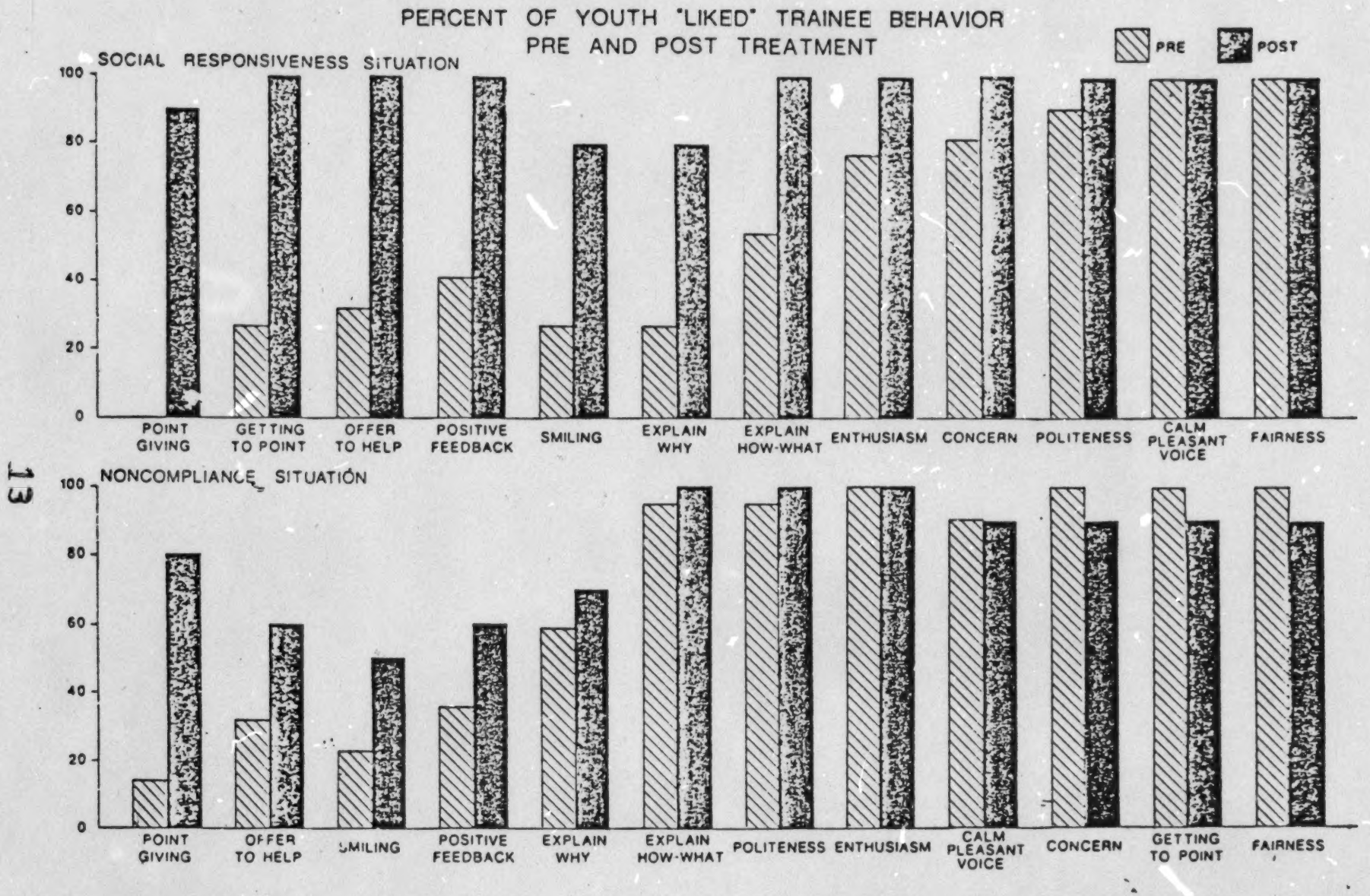
Consequently, as youth-care personnel become aware of the importance of pleasing as well as teaching their youth, and begin to acquire those skills necessary to accomplish both, it may prove beneficial not only to the satisfactions of their youth, but may enhance and facilitate the effectiveness of the behavior change procedures, as well. For, possibly, as youths begin to enjoy their interactions with adults, the feedback, modeling, and social consequences they receive, will have a greater impact upon them and lead to more <u>mutually</u> preferred interaction styles.



RATINGS OF TRAINEE SOCIAL BEHAVIOR



PERCENT OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE T-P TRAINEE BEHAVIOR


PERCENT OF YOUTH "LIKED" TRAINEE BEHAVIOR
PRE AND POST TREATMENT
PRE
POST
SOCIAL RESPONSIVENESS SITUATION
100
80
60
40
20
0
POINT GIVING
GETTING TO POINT
OFFER TO HELP
POSITIVE FEEDBACK
SMILING
EXPLAIN WHY
EXPLAIN HOW-WHAT
ENTHUSIASM
CONCERN
POLITENESS
CALM PLEASANT VOICE
FAIRNESS
NONCOMPLIANCE SITUATION
100
80
60
40
20
0
POINT GIVING
OFFER TO HELP
SMILING
POSITIVE FEEDBACK
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POLITENESS
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CONCERN
GETTING TO POINT
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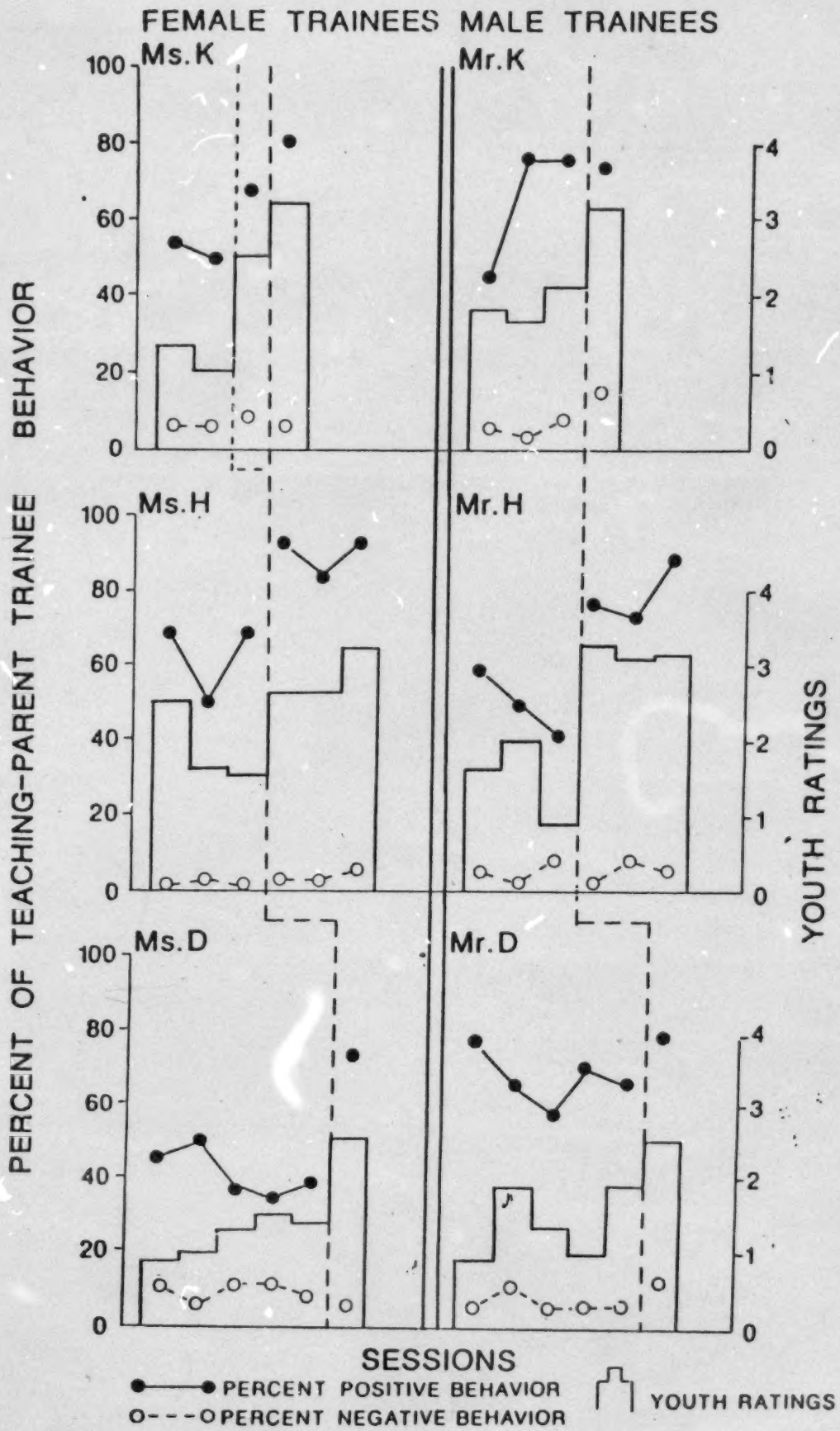
FEMALE TRAINEES
MALE TRAINEES
Ms.K
Mr.K
Ms.H
Mr.H
Ms.D
Mr.D
PERCENT OF TEACHING-PARENT TRAINEE BEHAVIOR
YOUTH RATINGS
SESSIONS
PERCENT POSITIVE BEHAVIOR
PERCENT NEGATIVE BEHAVIOR
YOUTH RATINGS

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